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## Bryniau Sir Faesyfed – Disgrifiad cryno

Dyma ardal o fryniau llyfnion, sy'n disgyn yn raddol o Ddyffryn Gwy yn y gorllewin i'r ffin yn y dwyrain. Ceir tirwedd gyffelyb dros y ffin ym mro Colunwy yn Lloegr, i'r gogledd o Geintun.

Mae tirwedd Sir Faesyfed yn drawiadol ac yn amrywiol, gyda gweunydd tonnog, agored wedi'u hollti gan ddyffrynnoedd. Rhwng eu llethrau serth ceir tiroedd pori wedi'u hamgáu â gwrychoedd, yn ymyl afonydd a nentydd bychain, a choedwigoedd hynafol. Gan nad yw ffurf y bryniau wedi'u ffensio, ceir ymdeimlad o agoredrwydd, ac o fod ymhell o gyfyngiadau a phwysau tirweddau eraill, mwy trefol. Yn llawer i le mae'r dirwedd amrywiol yn croesi'r ffin rhwng y bryniau a llawr gwlad, gan roi troedle i amaethu mylol.

Bu gan hen Sir Faesyfed y boblogaeth leiaf o holl siroedd Cymru. Mae Clawdd Offa yn mynd trwy ran ohoni, ac yn y dwyrain, yn nhir y Mers, ceir cymysgedd o ddylanwadau Cymraeg a Saesneg. Y mae'n fro wledig, ddistaw, ymhell o fwrlwm twristiaeth, er gwaethaf ei hyrwyddo megis "Gwlad Kilvert".

### Summary description

This is an area of gentle, smooth, upland hills, rising gradually from the border in the east, to the Wye Valley in the west. Similar character extends into England's Clun Forest area, north of Knighton.

Radnorshire's topography is breathtaking and varied, with smooth, rolling, open moors, dissected by steep sided valleys with hedgerow-enclosed pastures by small rivers and streams, and ancient woodlands. Unfenced moorland roads reinforce the sense of openness and being away from the confines and pressures of other, more urbanised landscapes. The varying topography straddles the upland-lowland divide in many places, giving rise to marginal agriculture.

Radnorshire, the old county name that included this area, historically had the lowest population of any of the Welsh counties. Offa's Dyke runs through part of the area and there are a mix of English and Welsh influences to the east in this Marches landscape. It is a very rural, and in the main it is a quiet area, away from the focus of tourism, despite promotion as 'Kilvert Country'.

#### Key Characteristics

**Smooth rounded moorland hills and glacially modified valleys** - Bedrock geology is that of Silurian rock, including sandstones, shales and mudstones.

**An undulating upland landscape** - with sinuous skylines and distant views from moor to moor.

**Extensive sheep and cattle rearing**

**Minor river valleys** - such as the Ithon and Marteg, dissect the area. A lateral network of minor tributaries drains the hillsides.

**Enclosed Pasture in valleys and lower hillsides** - with seasonally wet, deep peat soils and loams.

**Heather dominated moorland** - occurs in the most elevated parts of the area, some recognised for red grouse.

**A network of geometric fields of small to large scale** - defined by mixed native hedgerows interspersed with broadleaf woodland. few extensive blocks of coniferous



forestry.

**Shelter belts** – in exposed upland and hillside locations in a few locations, at times incongruous in location and geometric shape, often coniferous.

**Offa's Dyke** - illustrates the historic, strategic importance of this Marches landscape. Other historic elements included remnants of Medieval and post Medieval settlement, including motte and bailey castles, earthworks and moated sites.

**Very little settlement, which is confined to the lower valleys** – the pattern is defined by compact linear villages, together with a small number of larger nucleated, valley towns at river crossing points. A comparatively low population in this former county.

## Visual and Sensory Profile

This landscape is a varied area of steeply rounded, high hills and ridges, some with open moorland, others of enclosed pasture or forestry. These are interspersed with lower hills and valleys. The area is very rural and largely undisturbed by industries, heavy traffic, tourism or commuters, and herein lies its timeless beauty and tranquillity. Apart from the two main roads that run through, from east to west (A 44) and from south to north (A 483), the area is quiet and little frequented other than by the local rural population. The only small towns, Presteigne and Knighton, are on the periphery along the English border.

The sweeping moorland tops are open windswept. Those accessing the hills on foot, mountain bike or horseback find many miles of open tracks away from metalled roads. The moors are dotted with peaty 'mawn' ponds, small shallow lakes and pools in the hollows of the tops, traditionally used for stock watering by drovers, and often surrounded by rushes and reflecting the wide skies. In the centre is Radnor Forest, originally a royal hunting forest rather than woodland, are the highest and most extensive of the ranges of hills. These open hills are imposingly steep-sided and inhospitable, although parts of Radnor Forest are now covered with dark coniferous forestry.

Towards the north west of the area, the north to south aligned ridge of high open hills above Llandinam has a large windfarm, one of the first in Wales. These wind turbines, along with radio masts, are visible landmarks seen at a distance from all sides. From these hills there are long views out over surrounding lower hills and westward across the Severn to the Cambrian Mountains and Snowdonia further north. In the south is the smaller range of the Begwns overlooking 'Kilvert Country' of the Wye valley. The landscape of Radnorshire that we see today appears is largely that evolved through sequential advances in agriculture.



Quiet, rural valleys, with hedgerows and deciduous woodland, near Felindre. © John Briggs





The road near Glaschw, typifying the gentle, smooth, open hilltops, interspersed with farmed valleys. © John Briggs



Between Hundred House and Paincastle, showing the gentle, farmed valleys, bounded with hedgerows and fences, with hedgerow trees and open moors. © John Briggs



There are a number of valleys, separated by rolling open moorland. This one is seen from the B4355 between Dolfor and Felindre. © John Briggs





The valley above Felindre, with coniferous linear shelter belts. © John Briggs



The imprecise upland – lowland divide, a feature of many parts of Radnorshire, this one showing the road over the Black Mountain south of Felindre. © John Briggs

## Geological Landscape influences

The Radnorshire Hills landscape is dominated by a variety of sedimentary and volcanic rocks ranging in age from Precambrian to Silurian. Precambrian rocks, at over 700 million years old, crop out in two fault-bounded inliers within the Church Stretton Fault Zone near Old Radnor. Dolerite, gabbro and granite, interpreted as feeders to a volcanic complex, are exposed on the high ground at Hanter Hill and around Stanner Rock, whilst to the north west around Old Radnor and Dolyhir are steeply dipping siltstones, sandstones and conglomerates. These Precambrian rocks are of great importance because they record the development of some of the oldest known basement rocks in Wales.

The greater extent of this landscape is underlain by rocks of Ordovician and Silurian age, with the disposition of strata being a direct consequence of a phase of mountain building

that culminated during mid-Devonian times, approximately 400 million years ago, and also caused widespread folding and faulting.

The local landscape has been strongly influenced by several phases of ice-sheet glaciation during the Quaternary period. Ice that accumulated farther west in the Cambrian Mountains (the Central Wales Ice Sheet) is believed to have converged on the topographic depression formed by the Ithon and Irfon valleys. Whilst major, faster-moving glaciers occupied the flanking valleys such as the Wye and Severn, the ice-sheet is known to have overridden the Rhulen Hills and escaped southwards to the Wye Valley. At its furthest extent, the ice-sheet covered the whole area, feeding a large piedmont ice-lobe that expanded eastwards into the Herefordshire Basin and extended at least as far as the Lugg Valley. The principal effects of glaciation were to over-steepen and over-deepen valleys and to deposit a wide range of glacially derived materials.

## Landscape Habitats influences

The Radnorshire Hills are largely common land and contain some extensive tracts of dry heather moorland, as on Glascwm and Gladestry Hills SSSIs. They are typical of the Radnor uplands in having level summit plateaux at between 450- 550m altitude, but with steep sides arising from the river valleys below. Heather is dominant over much of the plateau area, but with much crowberry, bilberry and cowberry. Mire vegetation is confined to a few 'mawn' pools. Bracken is a common habitat on the steep lower slopes of the moors, often over a dwarf shrub understorey, and supporting a variety of birds such as ring ouzel, whinchat and redstart. The moorland has a high ornithological interest. Ireland Moor common on Llandeilo, Rhulen and Llanbedr Hills has one of the largest red grouse populations in Wales, and is used as a commercial shoot, with the heather regularly burnt to encourage new growth.

Radnor Forest is the highest upland block, forming a plateau up to 660m in height, again supporting heath communities over thin peat. The steep sided dingles and rock outcrops support rich plant communities, often calcareous in nature, including mossy saxifrage and rock stonecrop on cliff faces, and a variety of mosses and liverworts.

To the north of the area Maelienydd is an extent of both wet and dry unimproved acid grassland, important as a breeding and wintering habitat for a variety of waders and most noted for its population of pillwort in some of the small pools. In the south, the Begwns provide another area of unimproved open grassland, with gentle slopes and with extensive tracts of bracken dominated habitat. Where machinery can easily traverse the ground much of the bracken is harvested for winter bedding. Where not protected as common land, the Hills have been largely improved, and the rounded tops and well drained soils enabling ploughing and reseeding throughout. The lack of tree cover on the hills leads to a very open and featureless improved agricultural landscape in places.

The west of the area merges into the Cambrian Mountains. The east of the area borders with the Shropshire Hills in England, with Offa's Dyke providing an important boundary feature along much of this length. The east of the Radnor uplands is a considerably improved agricultural area, with a pastoral landscape of grazing pasture, mature hedges and hedgerow trees. Remnants of formerly more extensive mire and heath vegetation remain as isolated pockets, as at Rhos Goch for example, one of the few remaining areas of extensive lowland mire in eastern Wales.

There are significant small broadleaved woodland blocks, especially in the small river valleys, and forestry plantations, with those on the northern slopes of the Radnor Forest upland, and on the hills around Abbey-cwm-hir very prominent in the landscape.



## Historic Landscape influences

The Vale of Radnor and Walton Basin represent microcosms of the occupation and history of Radnorshire and its developed lowlands. Both are exceptional landscapes, archaeologically and historically, containing extensive prehistoric remains, including Mesolithic flint artefacts, Neolithic sites (one of which in the Walton Basin is the largest Neolithic enclosure in Britain), Bronze Age round barrows and the enigmatic Four Stones, two Iron Age hill forts - Pen Offa and Burfa - and sundry tumuli. A Roman fort and five marching camps were intended to guard the entrance to the hinterland.

Celtic Christianity came to Wales and Radnorshire in the 6th century. Four of the numerous missionaries - all contemporaries of St David - have distinct associations with Radnorshire: Teilo, Padarn, Cynllo and Cewydd. The missionaries established several clasau at St Harmon, Llanbister, Llowes, Glasbury, and Glascwm, which were centres of scholarship. Others established llanau - either as retreats or as potential focal points for missionary activity. Two centuries later, the manifestations of conflict were imprinted on the landscape with the building of the massive Mercian frontier work of Offa's Dyke, well preserved sections of which have survived in the area west of Knighton and Presteigne.

Immediately prior to the Norman Conquest, Harold Godwinson annexed much of the territory in 1062, including the manor of Old Radnor, and is reputed to have built New Radnor castle in timber in 1064. In the years following the Norman Conquest, motte and bailey fortifications were thrown up at Kinnerton, Evancoyd, Evenjobb, Womaston, Barland, Burfa, Knapp Farm, and Castle Nimble and as well as at Old Radnor.

This upland landscape is sparsely populated outside a few nucleated settlements, of which Knighton and Presteigne are pre-eminent. Both have early origins still evidenced in topography and plan, and both retain significant numbers of traditional buildings from the 16th century onwards. Presteigne appears to have exceeded Knighton in significance and status and boasts some buildings of exceptional quality. Other nucleated settlements are small villages mainly occupying the valleys. Of these, New Radnor was a Medieval borough which failed to grow (and may even have contracted), and others may have also have early origins, for example, where there is a castle site. Further west, villages are more clearly associated with principal through routes, linear in character and probably 19th century in origin (Llanbadarn Fynydd, St Harmon). Vernacular building traditions in the upland areas show a transition from timber to stone; in the towns, brick was also used from a relatively early date.

## Cultural Landscape influences

Radnorshire possesses extensive vestiges of past conflicts in its historic culture. With only four towns, two of which are not much bigger than large villages, generally located on its eastern and western borders, the county contains a very large number of small settlements mostly strung out along river valleys that have managed to penetrate the geological massif. Yet there is widespread evidence in these places of their original provenance, principally in the form of defensive mottes and baileys. Elsewhere, along a bewildering variety of small roads and lanes, and climbing up steep valley sides, are long-established farmsteads and farm holdings, frequently in inhospitable terrain.

Possibly the most important, and certainly the most evocative in the consciousness of the people of Wales is Radnorshire's sole recognisable monastic site - the Cistercian Abbey Cwmhir. There is a long-standing tradition that the body of Llywelyn ap Gruffud - Llywelyn the Last - was buried at the Abbey after his betrayal and death near Builth Wells in 1282; a

modern slab to commemorate him has been placed at the east end of the ruins. The ambition and splendour of the great church is gone now; not all, however, of the original fabric is lost: the Abbey's beautiful early 13th century arcade was removed and built into the Church of St Idloes in Llanidloes. There are also strong associations with Charles I who spent much of his youth and early manhood in leisure pursuits on a royal estate between Evanjobb and Presteigne.

Radnorshire enthusiastically embraced Puritanism which led to the Baptists deliberately choosing the county as their first mission field in Wales. Of outstanding importance in the early years of the Baptist movement were the houses at Llanyre, Knucklas, Llanddewi Ystradenni, Llanbister, Llangunllo, Nantmel, Cefnlllys, Llanfihangel Nant Melan, New Radnor and Glaschw. The Quaker outpost of the Pales is a living tribute to that movement. From the perspective of beliefs, religious or otherwise, it seems to embody the independent nature of the Radnorshire people.

The language of place-names is a feature of the culture of the Radnorshire Hills, many names being corruptions of both Welsh and English. Examples of monastic influence include Monaughty, Mynachdy, Dol y Mynach and the Monk's Trod, the historic moorland route taken by Cistercian monks between Strata Florida Abbey, Pontrhydfendigaid, and Abbey Cwmhir, Glasbury. Those prefixed with 'Clas' or 'Glas' attest to their origins as Early Christian monastic foundations. Places with odd sounding names such as Evenjobb and Burlingjobb are themselves corruptions of Old English.

In terms of the contemporary settlement and culture, Presteigne is being developed with new housing and industrial business parks, though it has yet to lose its essential charm as a Medieval market town. There is a thriving arts scene with Mid Border Arts, Presteigne Film Society and Presteigne Irish Music Society all staging regular events; and the Presteigne Festival of Music and Sheep Music (a weekend of world music in July). As well as its many examples of intriguing architecture dating from the Mediaeval period, the river bridge at Knighton is symbolic of the Janus-like attitude of the townspeople in this Border territory, whose identity - and colloquial language - is divided by the presence of the ancient barrier of the Dyke, whose presence is recognised in the form of the substantial and attractive Offa's Dyke Heritage Centre.